

REMARKS AT THE KYIV INTERFAITH FORUM'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAITH'S ROLE IN STATE, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS.

Kiev, 23 April 2013

Esteemed Mr. Feldman,

Distinguished Members of this Conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again it is an honour for us to be present at this international conference and as we begin our work to be able to say a few words on the role of religion and faith in our modern society. This is a crucial subject as we seek to build human communities around the world in which there is lasting peace, true justice, and authentic co-existence.

We would like to make three brief points.

The first point we wish to emphasize is that the religious impulse lies at the heart of our human condition. Time and time again it has been proven that the homo religiosus -that is, the inherent drive in human beings towards the transcendent and to eternal meaning – has survived and flourished throughout every other change in and challenge to human civilization. Indeed recently we have been hearing, in our modern technological idiom, that human beings are “hardwired” for belief in God. Religion is natural to us, and, as those who are made in the image and likeness of God, we are

constantly seeking our true eternal home.

We know that all human cultures are formed at their core by religion. So total is this formation of human culture, both at the individual and at the collective levels that those who have attempted to suppress or destroy religion have failed utterly. While it is true that in some cases one religion has successfully replaced another in a given culture, in no case have we ever witnessed a completely religion-less human society. And indeed, in those societies in which religion was fairly recently taboo, we have seen the resurgence of religious, belief and practice in unprecedented ways.

The second point that we wish to make is this. Because of the fact that the religious impulse is fundamental to human society, it can be a powerful force for good, or it can be a powerful weapon for evil. Religion is meant to serve God and to promote God's will for God's human creation. God is both the supreme Good and the absolute Beauty, and whatever is from God, therefore, is perfect and for our good.

But we know too well from our own experience that people can easily take religion into their own hands and use it to their own ends. In precisely this way are religious fundamentalisms and religious terrorism born, and because this is such a profound misdirection of the homo religiosus, it is therefore a most serious threat to human civilization. We cannot allow religion to be the tool of destruction or the reason for violence. This is not religion, and we who represent our respective traditions must be ever vigilant to condemn such acts and explanations. Religion serves the common good and our common humanity.

At its most creative – in other words, in its deepest reflection of the life of God – religion engenders in us a deep mutual respect for the other, and for each other's religious experience, We come from different religious traditions here, but each of our traditions shares an

understanding of what it means to be in relationship to God in prayer and worship, to be knit together in a community of shared values and beliefs, and to ask ourselves questions of appropriate response to the truths we profess. This is the shared ground from which we begin together to build a human future in which we can live together in mutual respect and in the richness of our diversity.

The third and final point we wish to make concerns Jerusalem. The land that we call the Holy Land is the home of the three great Abrahamic faiths that make up, together, the largest religious group in the world. Jews, Christians and Muslims not only share a region that is of supreme importance to us; we also share a deep inter-connectedness.

In the Holy Land, there is no doubt about the truth of all that we have been saying in these brief opening remarks this morning. Religion determines everything in our region, and it is not possible either to ignore religion, or to be dismissive of its determinative role in our life.

Jerusalem is a paradox. On the one hand it has been a place of conflict. We know this only too well. On the other hand, Jerusalem has also been the model of a community in which those of different religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds have lived together. And in all three Abrahamic traditions, Jerusalem is the city of hope, the image of that divine society in which all may live together in peace and harmony.

We wish to thank you, my dear Mr. Feldman, the founder of this Forum, for your vision and for bringing us together, so that we may take to heart matters that are both at the centre of every human conflict that is currently raging in our world, and that are also at the centre of the resolution to those conflicts. This conference owes its origin to your commitment to the eradication of any form of bigotry and prejudice in your own country and around the world.

May we all be agents of the deepest values of our respective religious traditions, so that the world may know that peace of God “which passes all understanding”, (Phil. 4:7) and which is the longing of every human heart.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

H. B. ADDRESS IN THE OCCASION OF THE JERUSALEM SYMPOSIUM ON GREEN AND ACCESSIBLE PILGRIMAGE.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 21 April 2013

Madame Deputy Mayor, Naomi Tsur

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us begin with some stirring words from the Book of the Prophet Daniel:

“Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, mountains and hills;

Bless the Lord all that grows in the ground;

Bless the Lord, seas and rivers;

Bless the Lord, all people on the earth;

sing, praise to him and highly exalt him forever". (Dan. 3:35, passim)

Our Holy Scriptures are full of the celebration of God's creation in all its beauty and wonder, and from the beginning, God's human creatures, the crown of God's creative act and energy, have been charged with the stewardship of creation.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, all reflection on creation begins with the declaration that the creation is God's, and not ours. This is the essential starting-place. As the Psalmist says, "*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it*", (Ps. 24:1). Here we see clearly another essential truth, that all human beings belong to God, and are intimately a part of creation, and not somehow separate from it.

All of us, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who live in this part of God's creation, in this Holy Land, understand the particularity of this region. As the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem has written recently, the three Abrahamic faiths, and the many diverse cultures of our city, have a deep reverence for this place, and it is crucial that we sharpen our sensitivity to the sense of holiness that we all feel here. This region, in which we all live is a blessed land, a land of God's special promise and presence, a land that has been bathed in the blood of the prophets, a land that has received the blood of Jesus Christ.

This Holy Land therefore lives a unique vocation as the spiritual meeting place between earth and heaven, and we are connected to heaven here precisely because of the blood of so many innocent martyrs from all our traditions down the ages.

As we think of the subject of "green pilgrimage," a number of

points suggest themselves.

Although it may at first seem odd, the desert is a place of “green pilgrimage.” The desert of the Holy Land is both a physical and a spiritual garden, and is full of the life of nature and the life of God. Just as the waters from the mountains flow to join the waters of the Jordan River, so the life of God, that breathes through the sacred history of the testaments of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, as well as through the heritage of the faith of Islam, has flourished down the ages in the life of our communities. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Mother of all the Churches, has always understood its mission to be the embodiment of this sacred history from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, from ancient times to the present day.

Nor let us forget the “green” significance of Jerusalem itself. The Garden of Paradise was the first Jerusalem, the original place of true peace, and it was indeed a spiritual garden. Into that green place, that place where the Divine Presence was in communion with human soul, God put the first human being to flourish. This Holy City stands as a promise to the world, that is, to our common humanity, for Jerusalem is also considered to be that eschatological green Garden to which all people are summoned in accessible pilgrimage to peaceful co-existence and abundant life.

If the Garden of Paradise was the first oasis for humanity, so in our time must Jerusalem – the pledge of Paradise to come – be an oasis for the human family. It is our duty and mission precisely to ensure this identity of Jerusalem, so that Jerusalem may be a beacon of hope and an example for other cities and places of pilgrimage.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS OF GREETING TO THE HONORABLE BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.A.

Bethlehem, 22 March 2013.

Mr. President,

The city of Bethlehem, the City of Peace, welcomes you today in this holy Church of the Nativity – the place where heaven and earth met, and where peace and reconciliation between God and humanity, as well as among human beings, took on our human flesh in Jesus Christ.

Here therefore we remember the words that announced to the shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among all people!” (Luke 2:14).

To this City of Peace, where for generations Christians and Muslims have lived together as one people, we welcome you as a leader and as a messenger of peace and reconciliation. The people of our region long for peace and have invested their hope and trust in those who have the power to lead the world into a new age of peace for all. For *“blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* (Mt. 5:9)

And so we look to you, Mr. President, as the leader of a great and noble nation that promotes the ideals of peace, reconciliation, justice and democratic principles among all peoples. It was here that the ideal of peace and reconciliation became a human being; and so it is fitting that from here you may gain strength and wisdom for the task ahead.

As the Patriarch of Jerusalem, on behalf of the Palestinian community, made up of Christians and Muslims, we extend to you the assurance of our best wishes and encouragement. And we pray that the King of Peace and Justice, who was born in this very holy place, may grant to you and to the Government of the United States, perseverance and vision in your work of governing.

We also wish to acknowledge the efforts and the commitment of His Excellency, President Mahmoud Abbas, in the cause of peace and co-existence in our region, and the resolution of an independent future for the Palestinian people.

In remembrance of your visit, Mr. President, would you please accept these symbolic gifts with the blessings of the Holy Land. And we look forward to seeing you when we come to Washington.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS AT THE FESTIVE SEASON CELEBRATION OF THE JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 30 January 2012

Mr. Mayor

Esteemed Members of the City Council,

Fellow Leaders of our Religious Communities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this holiday season, our hearts and minds are turned to that great promise that forms the origin of the Abrahamic traditions. This is the promise of peace. Peace is the foundation of the name of Jerusalem itself and the promise of our very destiny as a city.

Peace, we remember, is not simply the absence of conflict. Peace is a dynamic activity on the part of the human community and genuine peace rests on our shared values of mutual respect, justice and sincere co-existence. Without these characteristics, there may be an absence of conflict, but there will be no real peace in the sense that our religious traditions understand that God-given existence for which we were created.

We must not simply pray for peace – the peace of Jerusalem and the peace of our region and our world. We must turn our prayers into action and inhabit peace, a peace that is robust enough to embrace the rich diversity of the human family, a diversity that finds its destiny in our Creator.

Recently we were in London to visit the Hill House International Junior School, where we saw a multi-cultural and

multi-faith community in action. The pupils of the school are taught the values of mutual respect and co-existence from an early age. They learn about each other's faiths, cultures and histories. They form friendships for a lifetime across racial, ethnic and religious lines. They learn what they share a common humanity and a common human destiny that unite them at a deeper level than any differences of gender, religion, national origin or intellectual interest and ability.

It is the vocation of the unique spiritual character of Jerusalem to be the model for all of just this sort of informed, respectful multi-cultural and multi-religious co-existence. In the Greek language there is this splendid word symphonia – a concept of human community in which all our diverse voices are brought together not in cacophony but in harmony for the well-being of all.

In our Christmas and Epiphany feasts we experienced this harmony of diverse voices when we celebrated the epiphany in Jordan river. There were both pilgrims of all nationalities and local faithful as well as members of other faiths from nearby communities. There was a great spirit of joy.

Yet we must re-double our efforts. Of course there will be challenges but these challenges must not discourage us or be an excuse for giving up. Rather they must urge us on to the work before us. This festive season of peace and light is a living reminder also of our responsibility in working to bring genuine peace and symphonia to birth even in Jerusalem, the City of Peace and co-existence.

As the followers of our Abrahamic traditions and as civic and religious leaders, our mission together is to maintain this city as the city for all the spiritual descendants of Abraham. As we do this, we allow the divine light and justice that shine from Jerusalem to be a beacon of living hope to an anguished and hurting world.

As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly while we wait for adoptions the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:22-23).

May the blessings of this festive season fill our hearts and minds and may God, the Lord of Peace, Light and Justice, give us the courage and wisdom to build a genuine and lasting peace for the sake of our beloved Holy Land and for our whole region of the Middle East.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

CONGRATULATORY SPEECH UPON THE ELECTION OF H.B. ARCHBISHOP NURHAN MANOUGIAN, ARMENIAN PATRIARCH.

Your Beatitude,

Upon Your election by the Brotherhood of St. James, kindly accept Our congratulations on behalf of Our Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb and Our community, from Our Mediocrity.

We assure Your Beatitude of Our prayers as You prepare to assume Your pastoral ministry and Patriarchal responsibilities.

We trust that Our co-operation as guardians and servants of the Holy Places and as spiritual leaders of Our respective communities in Jerusalem and the Holy Land will continue to bear witness to Our Christian faith and cultural heritage.

Invoking upon Your Beatitude Our Lord Jesus Christ's grace and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit We again congratulate and wish You every success.

With love in Christ,

His Beatitude,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

GREETINGS TO THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE ARMENIAN CALENDAR.

Jerusalem, 21 January 2013

Your Eminence Archbishop Aris, Patriarchal Locum Tenens,
Your Eminences,
Reverend Fathers,
Members of the Brotherhood of Saint James,

Dear Brothers in Christ,

We are glad to be here today to congratulate you on your celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the great and ineffable mystery of his Epiphany, which you also keep at this time. On this occasion we recall the beautiful words of a great saint of the Armenian Church, Sain Nersess Lampbronatsi, who in a prayer to the Only-Begotten Son said:

O Christ, for our sake you became bearer of sin that we may become righteous for you.

For our sake you became earthly that we may become heavenly. For our sake you became bread that we, by partaking of you, may be sanctified.

You are hope. You are light. You are life. You are forgiveness itself. You are, indeed, immortality.

We join with you today in exultation at the birth and baptism of the One who is hope, light and life for the world, and we remember also the stirring words of our predecessor Patriarch Sophronios, who said of the Feast of the Epiphany:

For today the time for feasting has come.

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, came upon the waters. Today the uncreated One is by His own will touched by the creature.

Today the waters of the Jordan are turned into healing by the presence of the Lord. Today all creation is watered by mystical waters. Today our sins are washed away in the waters of the Jordan. Today Paradise is thrown open to humankind and the sun of righteousness shines upon us. Today the water that the people under Moses found bitter, is turned into sweetness at the Lord's presence.

Today the heavenly joins the earthly in celebration and that which is below holds discourse with that which is above.

It is this joyful spirit of the Nativity and the Epiphany that we are here to greet you, Your Eminence, the Brotherhood of

Saint James and the entire Armeninan community of the Holy Land.

We would also like to take this opportunity to assure you and the Brotherhood of our fervent prayers for the upcoming meeting of your Holy Synod this week. We pray that, guided by the Holy Spirit, you may choose a fit and worthy Patriarch to succeed His Beatitude Patriarch Tarkoom of blessed memory. We do not need to tell you of the serious responsibility that is ours as the Brotherhoods to whom the guardianship of the Holy Places has been entrusted. Our ecclesiastical and spiritual leadership is crucial for our mission to ensure the Christian character of Jerusalem and to encourage the Christian community of the Middle East. We need look no further than to our neighbor Syria and the crisis and horrible bloodshed there to have a visible and disturbing reminder of the urgency of the task before us.

We must make a firm resolve. Let us come to our senses. Our unity of purpose in this mission must be at the heart of our life as those who call Jerusalem our home. And as we are faithful to our God- given responsibilities together, we shall show forth the glory of God the glory of the Churches and the glory of this Holy City, Jerusalem.

Thank you for this opportunity to greet you. May God bless you, the Brotherhood of Saint James, and the Armenian community of the Holy Land in this festive Nativity season.

His Beatitude
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem

RESPONSE TO THE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS OF THE DELEGATION OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE.

GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE, 11 January 2013

Your Eminence Archbishop Aris,

Locum Tenens,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

“Christ is born! Glorify Him!”

We welcome you warmly to the Patriarchate in this Holy Season, and we thank you for your greetings as we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ. At this time of the year especially, when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, the world looks to the Holy Land in hope, where “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,” becomes incarnate and lives among us, (cf. Phil. 4:7).

Our Brotherhoods have been blessed with the task and mission in our beloved Holy Land of caring for and serving the Holy Places. By extension this places on our shoulders the mantle of being guardians of the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The Christian community is native to our region and essential to the integrity of the cultural diversity of the Holy Land, and we are witnesses to this.

It is acknowledged by all, both locally and internationally, in the civic as well as in the religious sphere, that the

Churches have a unique power to ensure the well-being and the future of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, as long as we are united in our common mission, and especially, as long as we manage to keep our family disagreements internal to ourselves and solve them in fraternal dialogue.

Most recently we were able to show this to the world during the cleaning of the Church of the Nativity, where we showed that dialogue in private is better than conflict in public.

Today as never before, especially in the face of the deep uncertainty that we face in our region we, who bear such a significant responsibility must accept the task that is ours, and remember always that our togetherness reflects on the Christian community of the Holy Land as a whole. Our occasional family disputes should not be permitted to tarnish our mission, not must we ever forget the security and well-being of all Christians of the Middle East. They are our concern, for they have been entrusted to us by God as their bishops and pastors.

As we welcome you today, we know that you are preparing for the election of a new Patriarch to succeed the late Patriarch Tarkoom of blessed memory. We assure you of our fervent prayers for your Brotherhood at this time, that God may provide for you a fitting and worthy new Patriarch and Superior of the Brotherhood of Saint James and spiritual head of the Armenian community,

May God give us grace and bless us all, that we may be made worthy of the charge that has been entrusted to us. And may the Incarnate Light that is born in the cave at Bethlehem on this Feast be the same light that is born in the cave of our hearts and minds, so that the world may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven, (cf. Mt 5:16).

We wish you a blessed Feast of the Nativity and a peaceful New Year.

“Christ is born! Glorify him!”

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarchate of Jerusalem

**RESPONSE TO THE GREETINGS OF
THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES AT
THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY.**

Holy City of Jerusalem, 9 January 2013.

Your Beatitude,

Your Excellency,

Your Grace,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Pastors,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

We welcome you with the joy of this Holy Season and we thank you for your greetings for the Feast of the Nativity. In the birth of the incarnate Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, from the All-Pure Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, we celebrate once again the triumph of light over darkness, truth over falsehood, and goodness over evil.

We celebrate the Nativity of Christ once again at a time of ongoing, and deepening, uncertainty and difficulty for our region, especially in Syria. The political and social situation in which we are living in the Middle East makes our proclamation of the Gospel all the more urgent, and it makes our co-operation as Christians the more crucial.

Our peoples and our region are desperate for spiritual leadership and for the hope that the incarnate Lord brings. For the Nativity of Christ is not an event of the past; it is an event that is taking place today. As we sing in our Liturgy:

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,

And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One!

(Kontakion for the Nativity)

We must not forget, too, that the world watches us at this season with a careful and expectant eye.

In one of his letters, which he wrote in the year 368, Saint Basil the Great praised the recently deceased Bishop Musonius of Neocaesarea. Saint Basil said of Bishop Musonius that during his life he had been “*a pillar of his homeland, an ornament of the churches, a pillar and support of the truth, a bastion of faith in Christ, the protector of his friends... [and] a guardian of ancestral laws.*” (Saint Basil Letters, 28:1).

May the same be said of us as Christian bishops and leaders.

More than ever before we are called to live in the Light of the Eternal Son of God. For our struggle in maintaining our Christian presence in our region *"is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness of evil in the heavenly places."* (Eph. 6:12). As St Paul says, we must *"keep alert, stand firm in [our] faith, be courageous, be strong", "doing everything in love"* for the sake of the Holy Places of which we are guardians and servants (cf. 1 Cor. 13). This is the vocation of us all, members of our respective fraternities, as well as those of us who are bishops and pastors.

As Saint Basil said of Bishop Musonius, we must be *"bastions of faith In Christ"* those who so overflow with *"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit,"* that all may see beyond us and our inadequate ministrations a glimpse of heaven. For at Christmas heaven comes down to earth.

We should never forget that we are first and foremost a liturgical community, and our celebration of the Feast of the Nativity in Bethlehem, inspires and makes real for all our people, as well as for so many pilgrims, the eternal and spiritual truths of the Incarnation. It is our privilege here in the Holy Land to express the true ecumenical spirit: the power of our unity rests in our spiritual and cultural diversity. This diversity is the true strength of our togetherness.

At this great Feast, may we join our voices, from the land of the justice and philanthopia of God that is Bethlehem, and the land of the hope and resurrection of God that is Jerusalem, in an appeal to all in authority to give their tireless efforts to work to stop the bloodshed of innocent people, to alleviate poverty, to clothe the naked, and give succor to widows and the orphaned around the world.

We pray to our newly-born Saviour Jesus Christ, that he may be

born in the cave of our hearts today. May the true Light that is born into the world on this Feast be the same light that is reflected in us, so that the World may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (cf. Mt. 5;16).

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

We wish you all a blessed and peaceful New Year-

Thank you” .

His Beatitude

Theophilos III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem

REMARKS FOR THE VISIT OF H.H. THE MAYOR OF JERUSALEM TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 3 January 2013

Mr Mayor,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are very glad to welcome you, Mr. Mayor, and your colleagues to Our Patriarchate during this festive season and

in the first days of this New Year. This is a period of hope, peace and reconciliation for us all. It is in this spirit that we greet you today.

As the oldest continuous institution in the Holy Land, the Patriarchate is an integral part of community life in Jerusalem. The Patriarchate is a living witness to the fact that the Christian community is native to this region. We are part not just of past history; we are also bound up with the well-being and true identity of the current and future life and development of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

This is clearly evident to those who share Our common history within Our Holy City and Our Holy Land at large. The legitimacy and role of Our Patriarchate of Jerusalem has long been inscribed and recognized regionally and globally; not least by the existing heritage of the "Status Quo". In fact, these realities are amassing increasing visibility among all those beyond our borders who care for and long for peace, stability, security and genuine co-existence.

As the guardians and servants of major and preeminent Holy Places, the Patriarchate is upheld as essential to the sacredness of the City and its history. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Patriarchate is the beacon that draws thousands of pilgrims a year to the Holy Land. In this respect the Patriarchate underscores the freedom of access to the Holy Places not only for Christians, but also for Jews, Muslims and all people of good will. The Patriarchate is especially conscious of the large number of pilgrims who come here from Eastern European and Balkan countries, like Russia, the Ukraine, Romania and Serbia.

In this mission, the Patriarchate enjoys the respect and support of all, both in our region and around the world. In upholding our spiritual and moral values, we are accepted as the primate among the Churches in our commitment to reconciliation, peace and co-existence. We seek always nothing

more or less than our legitimate heritage stemming from the sacred history of the Holy Land along with the rights and freedoms that enable us to carry out our Cod-given mission.

As we mark the New Year 2013 as well as Our own Christmas celebrations according to the Julian calendar, we wish to express to you, Mr. Mayor and your administration, our sincere appreciation for all that you are doing to ensure the genuine ethnic and religious diversity of our city, and not least your support for the Patriarchate. Needless to say that for countless generations we have been a strong and firm builder of harmonious co-existence between followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Being prudent not to enter into the temptation of isolationist thought and action, which can be distracting, We rather let the spirit of true co-operation and collaboration thrive between us in this New Year, so that we may serve all those committed to our care, and show to the world that Jerusalem is indeed the city of peace and living religious and cultural diversity.

May Cod bless you, Mr. Mayor, in your work on behalf of all the peoples of Our beloved Jerusalem.

Happy and Blessed New Year,

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

H. B. ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL & MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR.

31 December 2012

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Your Eminences,

Dear Reverend Fathers,

Distinguished Guests,

*“If any of you are qualified to be enrolled in our bodyguard,
let them be enrolled, and let there be peace among us, (1 Mac.
13:40)*

At the turn of the year, we greet you warmly in this season of renewal and hope, and we thank you for this opportunity to make these few remarks.

Events and gatherings such as this are of great importance both for celebrating the common bonds of our humanity, and for reminding ourselves of those fundamental values that are essential to our common life.

We are honored to be here with our fellow citizens of Jerusalem, and on behalf of the Christian Churches, the communities of Jerusalem, and all people of faith and good will, we extend our best wishes to you and to the people of Israel for the New Year.

The Christian presence is part and parcel of the history of this region, and the ongoing life of the Churches ensures the sacred uniqueness of Jerusalem and the religious character of the Holy Land as a whole. Our region bears witness to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and is a living testimony to inclusiveness, and, most importantly, to ethnic and religious diversity.

Our continued mission of being the Mother Church of the Holy Land, in fraternal relationship with our brothers and sisters of other Churches, strengthens our singular historical presence. Along with other Churches, the

Patriarchate of Jerusalem serves and safeguards the Holy Places and consequently we also serve and secure the Christian presence both in our region and in the wider Middle East.

New realities are emerging from the unpredictable political and socio-economic developments of our region. There is a clear need and desire for our experience to be both an anchor and a paradigm for this future that is in the making before our eyes. We in the Holy Land have a moral obligation to present to the rest of the region a path that leads to genuine freedom of religion, inter-religious engagement, and mutual respect, for we have a heritage of living and working together that is generations old. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the future of our world is inextricably bound up with the future that we build in the Holy Land for all our people.

Our shared history has taught us that the road to peace is a dynamic process, that is to say, that it is not through violence, but through dialogue. It is dialogue that builds

trust and mutual acceptance, and that shows us the way forward. Time and again we say that we condemn violence wherever it occurs, and the Patriarchate as well as the other Churches work whole-heartedly to build a lasting peace and security to which everyone, regardless of religious affiliation or cultural identity, is entitled.

Peace itself, the peace of which this Festive Season speaks and which we are all called to make, is not a single act. Peace involves the whole attitude and aspect of individuals, communities, and nations. It is a peace with and within the self, it is a peace with the whole created order, and it is a peace with one's fellow human beings. This sort of peace, which is in our Abrahamic traditions a reflection of the Divine, will always involve our complete, even sacrificial commitment. To paraphrase Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians, we can say this peace is a cause of our boasting (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15). For genuine peace to flourish we must lay aside every form of selfishness and fear. We must, as it is said in the Greek Scriptures, outdo one another in kenosis – in emptying ourselves for the sake of others.

The legitimate rights, privileges and the ancient customs of the Church and our communities, sanctioned by sacred history, must not be disregarded, for they constitute an integral part of the living communities of this Holy Land and beyond.

As difficult as it is to articulate, we cannot hide our concern at the attitude of certain groups that take the law into their own hands with the sole purpose to cause confusion and disturbance to the harmonious co-existence to which we all aspire.

Mr President, we commend you highly in your courageous position against sacrilegious acts that have been directed against the sacred gift of freedom of worship that we enjoy in our Holy Land. Your actions and stance in condemning strongly all forms of bigotry and prejudice against places of worship,

be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, is a clear example for all leaders to follow.

With such great efforts in building bridges of genuine rapprochement between our various communities, together we can work to inspire trust not only within our Christian community as whole but also with non-Christian communities as well. Be it access to the Holy Places, ease of travel for the clergy, and the relationship between our Church communities and civic and governmental offices, we have every confidence that these matters can be enhanced and taken into serious consideration.

Your Excellency, on behalf of all our Christian brothers and sisters, we thank you for your cordial invitation and your courteous hospitality. We pray God's grace upon the approaching New Year: may the Divine Spirit of this Festive Season enlighten our minds, warm our hearts, and lead us all to work diligently for the fulfillment of the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel.

For "without faith it is impossible to please God, whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

We wish you, Mr. President, and all the people of our beloved City and Holy Land the blessings of this season and a peaceful New Year.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem